

Governor Carney: It's time, Wilmington!

Op-ed by Governor John Carney

What makes a city great?

Cities are centers of commerce, arts, sports and places where we can live together. Great cities have good schools and safe and strong neighborhoods where every child has an opportunity to be successful.

But great cities are more than the sum of these parts. A city becomes great when its residents feel a collective sense of pride, satisfaction and gratitude for what they have built together.

That's why I joined Mayor Mike Purzycki and the neighborhood and community leaders of Wilmington on September 28th for the launch of the mayor's It's Time initiative.

Wilmington is the hidden jewel of the Mid-Atlantic. We might not get the attention of our larger neighbors north and south along the Amtrak corridor, but that shouldn't stop us from celebrating what we know makes Wilmington such a special place.

It's about time.

It's time to recognize that Wilmington is home to at least 50 financial, chemical, pharmaceutical and technology-based companies. They employ thousands of people, many of whom moved here to advance their careers.

It's time to recognize our strong neighborhoods and the tight-knit communities they support – from Southbridge to Hilltop to Forty Acres to the East Side to Triangle, where I live.

It's time to spread the word that Wilmington has an entrepreneurial culture, great for young people who may not want to work for a large company but are starting businesses that sell services and products to those larger companies based here. From start-ups at The Mill to companies that have grown like Chemours and Incyte, Wilmington has the jobs of the new economy.

No one wants a job in a place where the salaries don't keep up with the cost of living, or where the arts, recreational and eating and drinking scene is not vibrant. The best kept secret about Wilmington is that its salaries would be competitive even in our high-cost neighboring cities, but a dollar in Wilmington goes so much further.

It's time we stop keeping it a secret.

Compared to Wilmington, housing costs 131 percent more in Washington, DC; 34 percent more in Baltimore; and 18 percent more in Philadelphia. Someone earning \$70,000 a year in Wilmington could afford the same lifestyle of someone in Washington earning over \$101,000.

It's time to celebrate Wilmington's rich and diverse ethnic and cultural heritage. We have Latino immigrants, third and fourth generation Italian and Irish and Polish families, and a strong African American community.

If you walk down Market Street today, or along the Riverfront, you'll see a bustling city. You see senior citizens taking their grandkids to the Delaware History Museum. You see millennials enjoying happy hour at Merchant Bar or Farmer and the Cow or Chelsea Tavern. You see people of all ages at the Clifford Brown Jazz Festival, and cyclists from across the country at the Wilmington Grand Prix.

You see kids playing in our neighborhood parks – from Eden Park to Haynes Park to Judy Johnson Park to Prices Run to Canby Park. You see corporate lawyers and bankers at lunch at

Tonic or eating from food trucks in Rodney Square.

You see cyclists along the Markell Trail and runners along the Brandywine. You see families at the Hispanic Festival and Blue Rocks games and August Quarterly. You see students at the Delaware College of Art and Design and new residents at Market Street Village.

By the end of the year, you'll see professional basketball games and recreational lacrosse at the 76ers Fieldhouse. Whether you're new to the city or have lived here all your life, there's no denying that Wilmington is alive, and that it's our time – our moment.

Our success is the result of neighborhood and community leaders, business representatives, and elected officials working together to ensure that every Wilmingtonian has the opportunity to succeed in the new economy.

We have been making investments to improve quality of life for a diverse citizenry. We've sought assistance for homeless veterans in the city, supported new downtown residential and business development, pushed for the revival of the Queen, worked to restore Rodney Square, and helped attract the new UDairy Creamery and Stitch House Brewery.

I am a proud Wilmington resident who is standing with my neighbors throughout the city to recognize that what we have in Wilmington is what other towns are trying to become. No city will ever be perfect, but the worst thing we can do is not believe we are as good as we are.

It's time, Wilmington.